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Senate

The Senate met at 3 p.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. LEAHY).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Lord of life, help us to know You better that we may love You more.

Provide our lawmakers opportunities to be guided by Your wisdom and strengthened by Your presence. May Your presence lead them to a spiritual maturity that will honor You. Grant that this maturity will inspire them to be a part of the solution and not part of the problem. Show our Senators what they can do to lead our Nation toward a more perfect Union.

Stay close to us, mighty God, for we are Your children.

We pray in Your merciful Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Hawaii.

Ms. HIRONO. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. HIRONO). Without objection, it is so ordered.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Denis Richard McDonough, of Maryland, to be Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

1776 COMMISSION

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, in his inaugural address, President Biden said his "whole soul" was in the cause of "Bringing America together. Uniting our people. And uniting our Nation"—very worthy things to speak and especially in an inaugural address.

He also recognized that Americans have serious disagreements. Everyone knows that our country is deeply divided politically. I know from his time in the Senate that President Biden understands that people of good will can have honest disagreements about policy.

So he knows that unity does not mean dropping deeply held beliefs and accepting his own policy agenda. As he said—and I have two quotes here—"Every disagreement doesn't have to be a cause of total war" and "Disagreement must not lead to disunion." Real unity requires rediscovering what binds us together as Americans even when we have strongly disagreed politically.

As I have often said, our Nation is unique in human history in that it was founded not on the basis of common ethnic identity or loyalty to, let's say,

a Monarch but on certain enduring principles. Those principles are best articulated in the simple but elegant words of the Declaration of Independence. And you all read these regularly, I am sure.

We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.

It is a common commitment to this ideal that has bound us together as Americans from the beginning. Our patriot forefathers concluded that these principles were worth fighting for and took up arms in an improbable quest to defeat the largest and best trained military at that particular time. This included many Black patriots who fought for American independence—a unifying fact that I believe deserves a monument on the National Mall, something that I have been working toward for years.

I want to quote Margaret Thatcher. She once observed this. It is a fairly long quote, so bear with me.

Americans and Europeans alike sometimes forget how unique is the United States of America. No other nation has been created so swiftly and successfully. No other nation has been built upon an idea—the idea of liberty. No other nation has so successfully combined people of different races and nations within a single culture. Both the founding fathers of the United States and successive waves of immigrants to your country were determined to create a new identity. Whether in flight from persecution or from poverty, the huddled masses have, with few exceptions, welcomed American values, the American way of life and American opportunities. And America herself has bound them to her with powerful bonds of patriotism and pride. The European nations are not and can never be like this. They are the product of history and not of philosophy.

End of Thatcher's quote.

This quote from a British leader is one of the best summaries that I have read about American exceptionalism. The term "American exceptionalism" is often misunderstood, perhaps due to

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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a quirk of the English language. Merriam-Webster's dictionary gives three definitions of "exceptional": one, "forming an exception," as they give an example: "RARE, an exceptional number of rainy days"; or, two, "better than average: SUPERIOR, exceptional skill" are the words they expand on "average"; "deviating from the norm, such as having above or below average intelligence" or physical disability.

Many people here and abroad assume that those who talk about American exceptionalism are just using the second definition and simply asserting that the United States is better than any other country, and that is a wrong interpretation.

American exceptionalism is an assertion of the plain fact that America's foundation is very different from that of most other nations. However, our foundation is increasingly under attack from both the right and the left. Both the 1619 Project and White nationalists assert that America's founding principles are alive and that the United States was founded along ethnic lines.

Oddly enough, this was a position taken by John C. Calhoun in the U.S. Senate when he articulated an alternative to the founding principles intended to justify maintaining slavery in perpetuity. Fortunately, Abraham Lincoln, who revered the Declaration of Independence, prevailed.

The notion that our founding principles are a lie isn't just bad history; it breaks the bonds that unite Americans of all backgrounds.

The 1776 Commission was established specifically to "enable a rising generation to understand the history and principles of the founding of the United States in 1776 and to strive to perform a more perfect Union."

The introduction to "The 1776 Report" states that "a rediscovery of our shared identity rooted in our founding principles is the path to a renewed American unity and a confident American future."

I could not agree more. That is why I was disappointed to see President Biden terminate this commission the same day he took office after making his call for unity. The call to unity is exactly what the President asked for in his inaugural address.

What specifically in that 1776 Commission document does President Biden disagree with? Yes, the report is critical of far-left efforts to denigrate our founding principles, but it is also an important corrective to the alt-right effort to import European-style ethnonationalism, which is also deeply un-American in every sense.

"The 1776 Report" calls for "a restoration of American education, which can only be grounded on a history of those principles that is 'accurate, honest, unifying, inspiring, and ennobling.'"

By contrast, California has proposed an ethnic study curriculum that is rooted in the fundamental divisive ten-

ants of critical race theory, with its focus on separate groups of Americans into different degrees of oppressor and oppressed.

Interestingly, despite the California curriculum's focus on victims of prejudice, discussion of anti-Semitism is omitted in favor of criticism of Israel. This curriculum also totally skips over the life and work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Remember his dream? I quote that statement that he made:

It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

Now, that is a very unifying statement. I encourage all Americans to read "The 1776 Report" for yourself. See if you don't agree with the central message that shared attachment to our timeless founding principles is what binds us as a nation. It is no longer available on the main White House website, but it can still be found on the Trump administration's archived website. It is also available on the Hillsdale College website.

RUSSIA

Madam President, I have other short remarks that I want to make on another subject.

Twelve years ago this past Sunday, then-Vice President Biden was in Munich, Germany, to deliver the Obama administration's first major foreign policy speech to world leaders. He said:

It is time to press the reset button and to revisit the many areas where we can and should be working together with Russia.

The premise was that the Bush administration had been too tough on Russia, and a more conciliatory approach was needed.

Beyond the rhetoric, this involved abruptly scrapping planned missile defense cooperation with our allies, the Czechs and Poles, on the anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Poland. Keep in mind, this was 6 months after Russia had invaded and occupied territory of our ally, the Republic of Georgia, an occupation that is still ongoing this very day. That all happened a year after the publication of the book entitled "The New Cold War," by Edward Lucas, detailing the dangerous nature of the Putin regime.

The Russia reset was not just a failure; the reset was ill-conceived and counterproductive from the start. Putin's Russia, like the Soviet Union before it, only understands strength. Unilateral concessions actually encouraged further aggression, like we saw and still see with Ukraine.

I appreciate now-President Biden's more recent tough talk on Russia. I like his rhetoric better than many things that President Trump said. However, I like Trump's actions, like sanctions against the Nord Stream Pipeline, arming and training the Ukrainian military, and partnering with our frontline allies.

The Biden administration no longer talks of a Russian reset, but it has al-

ready announced the extension of the one legacy of the reset policy. The New START Treaty with Russia gutted important monitoring and verification measures that were included in the predecessor agreement.

President Reagan famously quoted a Russian proverb, "Trust, but verify," when he was negotiating with Mikhail Gorbachev. New START cut out the "verify" part, leaving only "trust." But surely we have all learned by now that we cannot trust Vladimir Putin. He has been caught redhanded violating other arms control treaties. So, as recently happened, extending the New START treaty without trying to improve it is a missed opportunity.

I hope that President Biden's future actions more closely match his words, and he scraps all vestiges of the Obama Russian reset policy that he announced 12 years ago this weekend.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President pro tempore, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

NOMINATION OF DENIS RICHARD MCDONOUGH

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, the Senate is steadily confirming members of President Biden's Cabinet and other key administration officials. In a few hours, we will add one more to the list when the Senate confirms Denis McDonough to serve as Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

Under President Obama, Mr. McDonough was a member of the National Security Council and the White House Chief of Staff. He was a regular face at Walter Reed and a frequent visitor of our troops deployed abroad.

The VA has one of the most sacred missions of all our Agencies, deriving its motto from President Lincoln's second inaugural address:

To care for those who shall have borne the battle.

But the task of achieving that mission is one of organization, institutional know-how, and administrative troubleshooting. I am confident that Mr. McDonough's decades of experience at the highest levels of government make him well qualified to take on the job.

Even as Senators prepare this week to sit as a Court of Impeachment, the Senate will continue its work on other responsibilities. Committees will continue to process nominations, including the nominees to lead the EPA, Department of Commerce, Department of Labor, and the Office of Management and Budget. At the same time, committees will continue the pressing work of addressing the COVID crisis.